Rupa

MISS X

One-Act Plays

J.P. DAS

The One-Act plays in this volume take a hard yet hilarious look at the two bleak customs which young people encounter on their way to matrimony. They also show a way out: In *Miss X* an unknown factor puts an end to the bargaining and bidding for dowry; whereas in *Made For Each Other* the prospective couple manage to get out of the unsavoury negotiation typical in an arranged marriage by employing novel ideas. Both these plays have great relevance to prevailing social conditions.

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Miss X

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One-Act Plays

Translated from
the Original Oriya

J.P. Das

Rupa & Co

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Contents

Miss X 1

Made for Each Other 14

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Miss X

(Radheshyam's sitting room. An old man—let's call him Gentleman I—is reading a newspaper and seems to be waiting for someone. Another old man—Gentleman II—enters. G I rises with respect. G II greets him with greater respect. Both sit down. They are silent, not knowing who will initiate the conversation. With considerable hesitation, G I breaks the silence.)

G *I*: I was reading today's newspaper.

G *II*: It is a commendable habit.

G *I*: If one has to keep informed about the world...

G *II*: About films, theatre, sports, literature...

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G *I*: About politics, crime, accidents...

G *II*: It is only through newspapers. I can go without a meal for a day, but I cannot live without the newspaper.

G *I*: You would not believe that I had a relapse of my fever when the newspaper did not appear one day. The doctor of course said that it was because I had overeaten that day. But I know for certain that it was because I had not read the newspaper.

(There is silence again for some time.)

G *II*: What were you reading in the paper?

G *I*: The matrimonial column.

G *II*: It's strange, but that also happens to be my favourite column.

G *I*: I thought you were married.

G *II*: *(somewhat embarrassed)* Well, I mean I was married when I was sixteen. But then I have not been able to give up the habit.

G *I*: Same here. I consider marriage the most important thing in life.

G *II*: The most important thing in all creation.

(There is silence again.)

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G II: All right. What is it that attracts you most in the matrimonial column?

G I: Dow...

G I: Dow—?

G I: *(hesitatingly)* Dow-ry.

G II: Yes, well, dowry. But—

G I: It would seem you don't support...

G II: Not exactly, but then...

G I: I also don't particularly...

G II: I do not believe in dowry.

G I: Nor do I. It is a blot on society.

G II: It is a crying shame.

G I: Down with dowry.

G II: Dowry has no place in marriage.

G I: Marriage is a heavenly institution.

G II: You have said it.

(Both close their eyes, as if contemplating on the heavenliness of marriage. Shasank enters, but they still do not open their eyes. Shashank coughs and they look at him.)

Shashank: You seem to be waiting for father. Have you asked someone?

G I: No.

Shashank: All right. I will tell him.

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(Shashank goes inside.)

G *I*: I thought you were Mr. Radheshyam.

G *II*: I assumed you were Radheshyam since I had been told that he resembles a madman.

G *I*: What do you mean? Do I look like a madman? Have you seen your own face in a mirror?

G *I*: Then you should have told me from the start that you were not Radheshyam. I need not have been so respectful to you.

G *I*: You mean to say I look like a madman!

G *II*: Anyone seeing you with that newspaper would have thought you were Radheshyam.

G *I*: You mean to say I look like a madman? I would say you resemble one.

(They are shouting at each other when Radhesyham enters—his own appearance settling the argument.)

Radheshyam: I knew that you would be arguing about it.

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(After an exchange of greetings, Radheshyam and the Gentlemen sit down.)

G I: Of course you would know.
G II: You are all-knowing.
G I: You are omni-silent.
Radheshyam: (ignoring it all) But what did you conclude? Lucky Nine or Chhoti Begum?
G I: Lucky Begum?
G II: Chhoti Nine?

(Radheshyam rises. So do the two Gentlemen.)

Radheshyam: (to G I) Who do you think will win? Lucky Nine or Chhoti Begum?
G I: *(hesitatingly)* Chhoti Begum.
Radheshyam: Ha, ha. You make me laugh. Chhoti Begum! Ha, ha. You do not know a thing.
G II: *(with confidence)* Who says Chhoti Begum will win? Lucky Nine is bound to be the winner.
Radheshyam: Ha, ha. You too are a funny fellow. Lucky Nine! You seem to be completely ignorant.

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G I: You mean neither will win?

Radheshyam: That is right. It is X's turn.

G II: What!

Radheshyam: You are absolutely uninformed.

G II: No, Sir, I read the newspaper...

Radheshyam: You read the newspaper?

G II: No. no. When I came in, this gentleman was reading the paper.

G I: Who was reading it? I was only fanning myself with it. I use newspapers only to pack fish.

G II: I wrap my slippers in newspaper.

(Radheshyam does not bother. They remain silent.)

Radheshyam: So why did you come here?

G I: I know your son Shankar.

G II: Shankar is a good friend of mine.

Radheshyam: But—

G I: No, no. My daughter Mira is his student.

G II: My daughter Nira is his student too.

Radheshyam: So they have done badly in their exams? And you expect Shankar to help? No, thank you. You may go. Goodbye.

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(Radheshyam gets up.)

G I: No, it is not that. Shankar wants to marry Mira.

G II: No, he wishes to marry Nira.

G I: Nira? Can't be. Nira is ugly.

G II: Mira is a hunchback.

G I: Nira is lame.

G II: Mira is blind.

G I: Nira is deaf and dumb.

Radheshyam: In any case bigamy is illegal.

G I: No, Shankar will marry only Mira.

G II: Only Nira.

Radheshyam: What do you want me to do?

G I: Shankar has only selected. You have to give your approval.

G II: How can the marriage take place without your assent?

(Radheshyam sits down.)

Radheshyam: Well, then. Do you believe in dowry?

(Both keep quiet trying to appraise Radheshyam's mind.)

Radheshyam: I do.

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G I: I also believe in dowry.

G II: Who does not?

Radheshyam: Then let's get it straight. How much are you willing to give?

G I: Five thousand.

(Radheshyam looks at G II.)

G II: Seven thousand.

G I: Eight thousand five hundred.

G II: Ten thousand.

Radheshyam: Please continue with the bids. I will return in a minute.

(Radheshyam goes in)

G I: Twelve thousand.

G II: Fourteen thousand.

(Shashank enters. He is dressed in a suit. Both mistake him for Shankar.)

G I: Mr Shankar—

Shashank: No, I am Shankar's younger brother. And my marriage is years away. But what are you doing here?

G I: We were discussing Shankar's marriage.

Shashank: Shankar's marriage? But he has already arranged his marriage with Ira.

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(Shashank leaves)

G I: Thank God. Shankar is marrying my daughter.

G II: He said Nira. Not Mira.

G I: No, I am sure he said Mira.

G II: No, it was Nira. I am glad I will not have to give any dowry.

G I: Who is paying dowry in any case? Shankar has himself decided to marry Mira.

G II: *(to himself)* I am sure I heard him say Nira.

(Both keep silent)

G I: *(to himself)* I knew X would win.

G II: What X? (*Correcting himself*) Of course everyone knew that X would win.

G I: But you also said Lucky Begum would win.

G II: Then tell me what is X?

G I: *(laughs)* So you do not know! Why should I tell you?

G II: Which means you do not know.

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(They keep quiet, and start reading the newspaper, each a sheet. Radheshyam enters. They do not rise this time. Radheshyam sits down.)

Radheshyam: Have you finished your bidding?

G I: It may sound strange to you, but I do not believe in dowry.

G II: Dowry is a slur on society.

G I: Dowry is a crying shame.

G II: And you will be pleased to know that Shankar has decided to marry Nira.

G I: Not Nira, Mira.

G II: No, no. It is Nira.

Radheshyam: Oh, Shankar only decided. He has not yet married the girl, has he? His decision means nothing. He may change his mind. It is I who will finalise his marriage.

G I: Well, then, it is fourteen thousand.

G II: I am sorry. I was mistaken. Of course I believe in dowry. Fifteen thousand.

(It strikes eight in the clock.)

Radheshyam: I am going to have my

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supper. Please decide between yourselves.

(Radheshyam goes inside. It becomes dark. It strikes nine and the lights come on as the two gentlemen are seated.)

G *II*: Twenty-three thousand.

G *I*: Twenty-three thousand and two hundred.

G *II*: Twenty-four thousand.

G *I*: Twenty-four thousand and two hundred.

G *II*: Twenty-five thousand.

G *I*: Twenty-five thousand and two hundred.

(Lights go off. It strikes ten. Lights come on.)

G *II*: Look here, I cannot keep bidding with you in this manner. You are really tight-fisted. Such slow bidding! I will wait till Radheshyam comes.

G *I*: All right. I will then mention such a figure that you will get a heart attack.

(Radheshyam comes.)

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Radheshyam: So what did you decide?
G I: I will pay fifty thousand.
G II: Seventy-five thousand.
G I: *(knowing he has lost)* Let me leave. It is late.

(G I leaves. Shashank enters. They do not look at him.)

G II: If you wish, I will make out the cheque now.

(He takes out a cheque book and writes.)

Shashank: It was X who won.
Radheshyam: Exactly as I thought.
Shashank: But what is happening here?
G II: We were deciding about Shankar's marriage.
Shashank: Shankar's marriage? *(He laughs)* He got married this evening. I am returning from the wedding party. Enjoyable party. Drinks and dinner.
Radheshyam: Whom did he marry? Mira?
G II: It must be Nira. *(He destroys the cheque.)*
Shashank: Neither Mira nor Nira. He married Ira.

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G II: It is late. I must leave.

Radheshyam: I always knew who would win.

(He goes inside)

G II: *(Goes out, but returns)* Is X Ira's pet name?

(Shashank laughs. He is drunk and mimes a horse.)

G II: Now I know. The winning filly.

(G II leaves. Shashank collects the torn bits of the cheque and looks at them longingly.)

Shashank: Seventy-five thousand rupees! What a fool Shankar is! But I refuse to be like him. I would like to have seventy-five thousand rupees. I will not fall in love.

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Made for Each Other

Scene 1

(A small sitting room. Professor and Mrs Sharma seem to be waiting for someone. The Professor is reading a magazine and his wife is busy knitting. Both are silent and Devdutt is pacing the room impatiently. He goes to the chair in front of his parents and tries to attract their attention. But the Professor continues to read and his wife keeps knitting. Finally Devdutt takes courage to speak up.)

Devdutt: I repeat I do not believe in this arrangement.

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(The Professor and his wife look at Devdutt disapprovingly.)

Prof: Count up to fifteen, again.

(Devdutt counts one to fifteen. The Professor returns to his magazine and Mrs Sharma to her knitting. Devdutt starts pacing the room again. A car stops outside. The Professor looks at his watch.)

Prof: I think the Judge Sahib has arrived. Go and find out, Devdutt.

(Devdutt goes out and returns.)

Devdutt: No, he has not come *(in the same breath)* and I do not believe in this arrangement.

Prof: But I do.

Mrs Sharma: And I do too.

Prof: What objection can there be to this arrangement? It is after all your marriage, and I want you to see the girl and approve of her. That is why I requested Judge Sahib to come here with his daughter. See her, talk to her, and if you agree, who are we to object?

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Mrs Sharma: That's right. Who are we?

(Another car stops. The Professor looks at Devdutt, who goes out and soon returns.)

Prof: (sternly) Devdutt...

(Devdutt starts counting one to fifteen.)

Prof: (looks at his watch) It's five now and the Judge Sahib should be here any minute.

(Judge Sahib enters followed by his daughter)

Judge: Look, I arrived exactly at five, for I am a firm believer in punctuality.

(The Professor and his wife greet them and request them to be seated. Judge Sahib keeps standing)

Judge: No, I cannot stay on now. I have an appointment with the Chief Justice at five minutes past five and I am a firm believer in punctuality. Let my daughter remain. The car will pick her up. And tomorrow, Devdutt, come and have dinner with us. At eight. On the dot.

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(Judge Sahib goes out repeating to himself that he is a firm believer in punctuality. Now they all look at the girl. She is still standing in a corner and gazing at them foolishly.)

Prof: Sit down, young girl.
Mrs Sharma: Please sit down.

(She apparently does not hear them.)

Girl: Did you say something?
Prof: (in a loud voice) Please sit down.
Mrs Sharma: (louder still) Sit down.

(She hears them this time and goes towards the sofa, but stumbles against a centre table. She manages to sit down.)

Prof: Sit down. Devdutt. *(To the girl)* This is our son Devdutt.

(The girl does not hear him.)

Mrs Sharma: (loudly) This is our son Devdutt.

(She hears her and instead of greeting Devdutt, greets the Professor.)

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Prof: Devdutt is sitting that side. *(Loudly)* What is your name?

Girl: Tibha.

Prof: Tibha? That's a strange name.

(The girl gets up and looks for something on the floor. Everyone looks at her in surprise.)

Girl: My glasses. I think they fell off when I stumbled. Please help me find them.

(The Professor and his wife begin searching for her spectacles.)

Prof: I cannot find any glasses here.

Mrs Sharma: There are no glasses here.

Devdutt: That is because she was not wearing any glasses when she arrived.

Prof: Now that you mention it, that is true.

Mrs Sharma: Yes, that is right.

Prof: Don't worry. You have perhaps left your glasses at home. What are you studying?

(The girl does not respond and so the Professor repeats the question in an emphatic tone.)

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Girl: (almost shouts back) In the first year. For the last two years. But what about my glasses? Are you sure I did not have them when I came?

Prof: No, you did not.

(No one speaks for some time.)

Prof: Which college do you study in?

Girl: Yes, in the first year. For the last two years. *(Suddenly)* Ah...

Prof: No, you did not have the glasses when you came.

Mrs Sharma: You did not have glasses.

Girl: No, not glasses. It has started.

Prof: What has started?

Girl: The pain in my left leg. *(She begins moaning.)* Let me go home now.

Prof: (irritated now) All right, go home.

Girl: But are you sure I did not drop my glasses here?

Prof: No, no.

Girl: Let me go then.

(She walks out trying to find her way through the furniture.)

Prof: The Judge Sahib was saying that his

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daughter was a brilliant student.

Mrs Sharma: And sings well.

Prof: But I find she is blind.

Mrs Sharma: And stone deaf.

Devdutt: But not dumb.

Mrs Sharma: (ignoring him) She has rheumatism.

Prof: She is an idiot. Her IQ is zero.

Mrs Sharma: She has a funny name.

Prof: I do not approve of the girl.

Mrs Sharma: I do not approve at all.

Devdutt: But I approve of her. And I am going to have dinner with the Judge tomorrow.

Prof: I do not believe in this arrangement.

Mrs Sharma: Neither do I.

Devdutt: But I do.

(Devdutt goes out leaving his parents flabbergasted.)

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Scene 2

(Judge Sahib's dining room. The girl sits alone at the table looking at her watch. She says eight o'clock and Judge Sahib enters the room.)

Judge: Where is Devdutt, Pratibha? It is already eight and I do not approve of unpunctuality.

(A bearer gives the Judge Sahib a piece of paper, which he passes on to Pratibha.)

Pratibha: (reads) Devdutt thanks the honourable judge for his gracious invitation to dinner.

(Devdutt enters. He carries a swagger stick. He is drunk.)

Devdutt: And is pleased to accept the same.

(He bows to them with a flourish. Judge Sahib and his daughter stand to receive him and look at him not knowing what to do.)

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Devdutt: Hello Judge Sahib. How do you do? Pleased to meet you. *(To the girl)* And you, dear. How do you do?

(He extends his hand, but the girl ignores him)

(Devdutt removes his jacket, drapes it across a chair and sits down comfortably.)

Devdutt: Why are you standing? Do sit down. Be comfortable. I am extremely grateful that you accepted my invitation. Extremely grateful. Please be seated.

(When they do not sit down, Devdutt picks up the stick and brandishes it at them. They sit down.)

Devdutt: (laughs) That's better. And what would you like to have? A whisky or a gin? Or a spot of champagne for you, mademoiselle? No? Then what will you have? A glass of water? Aqua pura? Boy, three glasses of water, please. The Judge Sahib believes in prohibition.

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(He laughs again.)

Judge: I was going to tell you...

Devdutt: I know. You want to have a drink on the quiet. Boy—

(The bearer arrives)

Devdutt: Show me the washroom, please.

(Devdutt follows the bearer inside.)

Judge: This man has no sense of time. He is mad.

Pratibha: He is a drunkard.

Judge: Delirium tremens. I know a man just by looking at him once and write my judgement the moment I see the accused in the dock. I know for certain that this man is due for the gallows.

Pratibha: He is dangerous.

Judge: But then I am getting late for dinner and I am a firm believer in punctuality. Boy, please, serve dinner in my bedroom.

Pratibha: Mine, too. And when that man arrives, tell him that we have gone to bed.

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(Devdutt enters and brandishes his stick.)

Devdutt: Sit down. You see, I lost my way coming out of the bathroom.

(They all sit down. Devdutt passes the glasses of water to them, and says "Cheers" and starts drinking. When they do not drink, Devdutt lifts his glass and they pretend to drink. Devdutt suddenly looks at his watch.)

Devdutt: All right, you can go now. It is now time for me to go to bed. Exactly at thirteen minutes past eight. And I am a firm believer in punctuality.

(He shakes hands with Judge Sahib. They turn to leave the room)

Devdutt: Shouldn't you be thanking me for the dinner?

Judge: Oh, yes. Thank you very much.

Devdutt: (with humility) Please do not mention it. It was nice of you to come. It was my pleasure. Good night. *(Looks at his watch)* Oh my God! Eight fifteen already! I should have gone to bed now.

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(Devdutt puts his head on the dining table and falls. Judge Sahib goes inside. Pratibha picks up the stick and hits Devdutt.)

Pratibha: Hey, Mister.

(Devdutt rises with a start)

Devdutt: No, I do not have glasses.
Pratibha: Thank you, I do not use glasses. My eyesight is reasonably good.
Devdutt: But not your hearing.
Pratibha: I am not deaf either.
Devdutt: Rheumatic?
Pratibha: Not even that.
Devdutt: But then you are an idiot. Your IQ, is zero.
Pratibha: No.
Devdutt: But then?
Pratibha: I was acting, for I do not want to spoil my successful student career by marrying. And I did not want to displease my father either.
Devdutt: Good for you. You may go now. I am going to sleep now. Good night.

(Devdutt puts his head on the table to sleep. Pratibha hits him with the stick, this time a little harder. Devdutt gets up.)

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Pratibha: Put on your jacket and get out quietly, you drunken fellow.

(Devdutt straightens his tie and puts on his coat.)

Devdutt: No, I am not a drunk.
Pratibha: Then you must be mad. A criminal heading for the gallows.
Devdutt: No chance.
Pratibha: Delirium tremens?
Devdutt: No.
Pratibha: So—
Devdutt: I have decided to marry another girl. And so I was acting so that the Judge Sahib would himself disapprove.
Pratibha: (returns the stick to Devdutt) That is strange!
Devdutt: No, no. There is nothing strange. You count up to fifteen and you will find everything is all right. Oh, my God. I have to meet her and I am a firm believer in punctuality.

(Devdutt hands over the stick to Pratibha and rushes out. Pratibha looks at the stick wonderingly and begins counting—one, two, three, four ...)

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Dr J. P. Das is an eminent Oriya poet, playwright and fiction writer, and also an art-historian and critic. He has been the Vice-Chairman of National School of Drama. The world we encounter in his writings is the everyday world of a contemporary , mainly urban, middle-class India. His play *Before the Sunset* is considered a classic in Indian Drama. His plays have been widely translated into English, Hindi and other Indian languages. They have also been widely staged' in different 'parts of the country besides being adapted for radio and television.

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